



## COLLEEN CARSWELL

### Ward 1 Trustee—Board Vice-Chair

Colleen Carswell has been helping parents navigate the public school system since 1992. It is, she says, one of her most important duties as a trustee.

She knows from experience how necessary that is. As a young mom trying to start a lunch program at her children's school, Colleen discovered dealing with the system can sometimes be daunting.

Wanting to remove that barrier—coupled with a long family history of community service—is what motivated her to run for school board, and continues to motivate her over two decades later.

Helping her constituents requires good communication skills that begin with really listening, she says. It's only by listening that she can determine the best way to help them through the process and be

sure their concerns are heard. The trustee is the link between the community and the division, so communication must go both ways, she adds. Trustees must keep the community informed of the decisions they make, and be prepared to justify them when there is dissent.

Indeed, making the tough decisions can be the hardest part of the job. But Colleen's guiding principle is to always be true to herself and to what she promised her constituents—every vote at the board table will be based on what's best for the students, the staff, and the community.

Trustees are not political. It's something Colleen appreciates about the job because it means the school board can work as a genuine team. The board has a wide range of duties, but she cites three she believes are especially important—passing and upholding policies that help guide the practices that reflect who and what the school division is; setting annual budgets that strive to represent what's best for students and staff at a cost their taxpayers can afford; and hiring senior administrators, the group with whom they work most closely.

Colleen had children in school when she first became a trustee; now she has grandchildren. It brings her full circle, she says. She gets joy from watching them learn, and she gets satisfaction knowing she's part of a team that can help make the education system the very best it can be so future generations can be the very best they can be.